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ABSTRACT

This study compared student-teacher perception about discipline, investigated whether it was interpersonal, procedural, or substantive, and examined how ethnicity, achievement, gender, and position influenced practice. G. Gay's theory (1981) about interethnic group interactions combined with perceptual disparity and cultural discontinuity provided the conceptual framework. Data sources were interviews, classroom observations, and school records. Sixteen African American, Chicano, European American, and Filipino students and nine teachers from an urban high school participated. The data analysis revealed that interpersonal conflicts were more consequential for students of color. Evidence of disparate perceptions among ethnically diverse students and teachers surfaced. The attitudes, beliefs, and values of students and teachers differed and were associated with ethnicity, gender, and level of academic achievement. The investigation did suggest that students were not as powerless as some might think, and that they often acted deliberately on their beliefs, rather than merely reacting to the behaviors of others. (Contains 29 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Urban Classroom Conflict: Student-Teacher Perception:

Ethnic Integrity, Solidarity, and Resistance

Rosa Hernández Sheets

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Abstract

This study compared student-teacher perception about discipline, inquired if it were interpersonal, procedural or substantive, and examined how ethnicity, achievement, gender, and position influenced practice. Gay's (1981) theory about interethnic group interactions combined with perceptual disparity and cultural discontinuity provided the conceptual framework. Data sources were interviews, classroom observations, and school records. Students (N = 16), African, Chicano, European, and Filipino, and teachers (N = 9)) from an urban high school participated. The data analysis revealed that interpersonal conflicts were more consequential for students of color. Evidence of disparate perceptions among ethnically diverse students and teachers surfaced. The attitudes, beliefs, and values of students and teachers differed and were associated with ethnicity, gender, and level of academic achievement.

Urban Classroom Conflict: Student-Teacher Perception:

Ethnic Integrity, Solidarity, and Resistance

Administrators, teachers, and the public identify discipline as one of the highest priority concerns in public schools today. Yet, it continues largely unabated, misunderstood, and unresolved. Disciplinary problems have been documented, described, and categorized by frequency, type, and severity. Intervention models, handbooks, and training programs to improve classroom management skills of teachers have been developed and implemented. Schunk and Meece (1992) state that a weakness of past research is the limited attention given to student perception. They maintain that although teachers play a key role in establishing classroom climate students contribute substantially to classroom order by either cooperating or resisting. They influence classroom events as much as they are affected by them. Students also cling to their value orientations, set rules for social relationships, make decisions to preserve their ethnic integrity, create spaces of resistance, and forge bonds of solidarity within the structure of schooling (Sheets, 1995a). Consequently, classroom practices and school policies of regimentation designed to homogenize diverse student populations into "well-behaved" students may inadvertently cause behavioral conflict.

This article is based on a study which used perception of four different ethnic groups of students — African, Chicano, European and Filipino American — who experience disciplinary problems to understand *why*, despite well-intentioned efforts of school staff, problems not only persist, but are disproportionately directed toward males and ethnic minority students. This study provides explanation for disciplinary practices by examining the types of discipline and exploring the motives, values, and attitudes of students who are perceived both as victims and precipators in disciplinary acts. The investigation also explored how students' perceptions of classroom conflict that lead to disciplinary actions compare with those of teachers.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical ideas of interethnic group interactions in culturally pluralistic classrooms suggested by Gay (1981) provided the major conceptual parameters for this study. They were

further refined and embellished by theories about disparity in perceptions and cultural discontinuity among ethnically different students and teachers. The investigation concentrated on the interpersonal interactions between students and teachers. Imbedded in this emphasis is the belief that many of the disciplinary problems between students of color and their teachers are located in interpersonal interactions.

Conflicts occur when individuals perceive that different interests, beliefs, or goals can not be achieved simultaneously within a given situation. Diversity based on culture, race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, language, nationality, and individuality contribute to the causes of conflict in social and interpersonal relations. Gay (1981) argues that conflict between teachers and students in pluralistic classrooms results from dissimilar goals, behavioral patterns, cultural codes, value systems, and background experiences. She classifies this conflict as three types: procedural, substantive, and interpersonal. Procedural Conflict: Procedural conflict refers to a particular way of accomplishing something by following established protocols. In the classroom, it relates to the body of rules and regulations administered by teachers that determine the steps to follow in a given situation. Substantive Conflict: Substantive conflict refers to the essential characteristics of something. In the classroom, substantive relates to the content of instruction, the subject matter being taught. This type of conflict may occur in the classroom when the academic goals and expectations of students and teachers differ. Interpersonal Conflict: Interpersonal conflict is the social behavior that takes place in the relationship between individuals in a given setting. Interpersonal conflicts in the classroom stem from different values, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and bad behaviors of teachers and students.

Gay (1981) posits that of these three types of conflict interpersonal ones are the most consequential. They can require mental, social, and psychological energy, time, and effort that distract students and teachers from instructional tasks. Boykin (1986), Au (1993), and Shade and New (1993) argue that these tensions and their potentially negative consequences intensify when students and teachers do not share the same cultural backgrounds and ethnic identities.

Furthermore, the degree of acceptance of the school culture by students is another source of conflict.

According to Freeman (1992) classroom conflict can be a consequence of incompatible perceptual differences between teachers and students when either believes that their needs and values are threatened. Perceptions are inf'uenced by biases that operate in the "ego-centric view" individuals use to interpret their social structure and are directly affected by social, ethnic, and cultural affiliations. These differences in the backgrounds of the individuals often lead to perceptual disparities and social incompatibilities in interpersonal interactions.

These incongruencies can cause the actions of teachers to be discriminatory and detrimental toward students whose cultural backgrounds and values differ from their own (Spindler & Spindler, 1993). Although dissimilar people are not always disliked, Byrne (1971) found that individuals tend to prefer those who share similar values and attitudes and disfavor those who disagree with what they believe. For example, teachers whose cultural backgrounds value passive, quiet working environments might penalize students who move around and talk during seat work. Consequently, when cultural and family socialization patterns are in direct opposition to school cultural expectations the potential for classroom conflict increases.

Methods

A qualitative methodology used interviews, classroom observations, and disciplinary records to examine the cross-cultural factors that are associated with conflicts. Information from the interviews provided the primary source for student-teacher perception of discipline. Classroom observations allowed the researcher to examine actual interpersonal interactions between students and teachers. District, school, and student records provided information on the frequency, type, and distribution of disciplinary actions taken toward students who participated in the study.

Lincoln High School (a pseudonym), where this study took place, is one of ten high schools in an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest, U.S.A. It is located in a predominately White middle-class community. Most of the ethnic minority students assigned to Lincoln High School are bussed from the central and international sectors of the city in order to meet federal desegregation requirements. In the 1994-1995 school year it had an enrollment of approximately 1100. The composite students of color accounted for 64.3% of this total. The distribution of students of color included 37.1% Asian American of which 5.9% were Filipino American; 16.6% African American, 6.9% Latino American, and 38.2% European American. Approximately 77% of the teaching staff was European American.

According to district data, 49.4% of the Lincoln student body lived in single-parent households, 37.5% received free or reduced lunch, and 19.2% were identified as having limited English proficiency. These percentages are slightly higher than the overall district percentages. In the 1993-1994 school year it had a graduation rate of 66%, 20% of the students were below grade level, and 44.9% transferred in and out. During the same period, 32% of the students were suspended and 2% were expelled.

Because of its location in an urban area, ethnic student population distribution, and disciplinary patterns, Lincoln was selected as representative of schools that experience disciplinary problems in general. It has many of the features of the schools studied by Garza-Lubeck (1992). He found that urban teachers, especially on the high school level, were confronted with disciplinary problems at a much higher level than teachers in rural and suburban schools.

Participants were 16 students and 9 teachers. The student group (N = 16) included four students from each group: African, Chicano, European, and Filipino American. Two males and two females were selected from each group. Two students, one male and one female from each ethnic group were identified with the highest number of reported disciplinary actions and two with the least. Frequency and severity of the misbehavior were used to make these determinations.

The student group, 9 through 12, had an average cumulative GPA of 1.96 on a 4.0 scale, with a range from 1.71 to 2.08. African American students had the second lowest average GPA (1.72). None were biracial, and all were native born, came from single-parent families, and attended more than one high school. The average GPA for European Americans was 1.62. All four, native born, came from single-parent families and had attended only the high school where the study took place. The Filipino American students had the highest GPA (2.08). All were bilingual but not eligible for transitional bilingual services. They were native born and lived with their fathers. Two Chicana American students (female) were bilingual, three came from single-parent homes, and all three were native born. Dora (CAF2)[1] was born in Mexico but had lived in the United States since the age of five. She was selected as participant because the U.S. native born female, Chicana American students at Lincoln did not have any disciplinary action. Chicano American students had the lowest average cumulative GPA.

The teachers who participated in the study were student selected. Students chose teachers they liked best or with whom they felt most successful. Although there were 16 student participants, three of the teachers were selected more than once, reducing the number of teacher participants to nine; six females, (one African American, one Chicana, and four European Americans) and three European American males, one of whom was Jewish. The years of professional experience ranged from less than one to 29 years. Two of the European American females were first year teachers who had completed their internship at Lincoln the previous year. The remaining six teachers averaged 20 years of teaching experience. Four

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[1] Throughout the presentation of the results students are identified by ethnicity (AA -African American, EA-European American, FA-Filipino American and CA-Chicana American), gender (F-female and M-male), and severity of disciplinary action experienced (1-high and 2-low) in order to attribute specific perceptions, comments and explanations. For example, Femi (pseudonym), coded AAF1, is an African American female who experienced major disciplinary actions.

teachers taught electives (Home Economics, Study Skills and Auto Shop), three taught Social Studies-Language Arts, and three taught Math. One of the teachers taught an honors class in math.

Limitations of the Study

Features of this study that provided direction also were the sources of several limitations. These related to sample size, sample selection, data collection methods, and researcher effects. The data generated from this study were provided by a small sample size. Because the qualitative methodology used in this investigation relies on data from few participants the findings cannot be generalized to any claims beyond this sample. However, the overall intent of this study, which was to generalize to theory, is consistent with the methodology used.

The criteria used to select the students to participate in this study created another limitation. By including only students who had experienced the most and least disciplinary problems, some significant features of disciplinary issues may have been overlooked. These extreme polar positions may have biased the results and affected the reliability of the representativeness of the sample. The criteria to make purposeful participant selection recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984) was used to counteract this limitation. This included selecting more than two contrasting cases that were representative of the sample population.

The third limitation is associated with the sources for data collection. The majority of the data came from self-reports. The retrospective nature of self-report data may be subject to errors in recall and inaccurate over- or under-reporting. Although a standardized protocol guided the open-ended interviews, the participants might have withheld, exaggerated, or forgotten information. To counteract these possibilities the researcher followed the advise of Assor and Connell (1992) and Miles and Huberman (1984) about using multiple data sources and triangulation. This study included data from interviews, classroom observations and student records.

The fact that all data were collected and analyzed by the researcher is another limitation of the study. The researcher's employment in the school district where the study took place may have influenced the findings. Efforts to control for this limitation included the use of data collection and analysis strategies recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984) and Silverman (1993). Interviews were audio-taped, detailed field notes were recorded immediately after the contact, and consistency checks were used that included established coding schemes, data display matrices, negative evidence, and testing findings for confirmability prior to making conclusions.

Major Findings

The data analysis revealed that student-teacher conflicts were interpersonal, procedural and substantive. Interpersonal conflicts were more consequential for students of color. Evidence of disparate student-teacher perceptions among ethnically diverse students and teachers surfaced. The attitudes, beliefs, and values of students and teachers differed and were associated with ethnicity, gender, and level of academic achievement. The major findings generated by this investigation are summarized and followed by a discussion of the themes and patterns that emerged.

- Generally, there was more agreement than disagreement among students and teachers about the nature, process, and effects of disciplinary tensions in classrooms. Differences appeared in the priorities given to the causes and in the extent and range of explanations given for the presence or absence of student-teacher conflicts.
- The greater number of disciplinary actions was interpersonal which was consistent with the theoretical framework of this investigation. Procedural conflicts, second highest in frequency, were significantly fewer than interpersonal. Virtually no substantive conflicts occurred.
- When students and teacher were viewed as separate groups, their role and status were more significant than ethnicity and gender in determining shared meanings across the various trends and patterns that emerged.

• Ethnicity was a distinguishing feature in students' perceptions. Similar explanations for disciplinary practices united students of color. The perceptions of African American, Filipino American, and Chicano American students were consensual and tended to follow the same directional patterns. Both students and teachers felt racism was a motivating factor in disciplinary actions toward students. Some European Americans perceived racial discrimination to be unintentional, whereas all participants of color saw it as conscious and deliberate.

• Gender did not unite or differentiate students' or teachers' perceptions of disciplinary practices in classrooms. On the occasions when it did occur European American females differed from their male counterparts. They were more in line with opinions of participants of color. Students and teachers agreed with the research literature indicating that males were disciplined more often and severely than females.

• The rank ordering by ethnicity, frequency, and severity of discipline practiced conformed to patterns established in other research. In descending order they are: African American, Chicano American, Filipino American, and European American.

• Both students and teachers across gender and ethnic groups agreed that ethnicity, gender, academic achievement, and past disciplinary history had a significant effect on how disciplinary actions were distributed to students.

• Ethnicity was a significant factor in the coping and problem-solving strategies used to handle classroom conflict for both students and teachers. Although avoidance as a type of coping mechanism was common to all participants, explanation for its need was dissimilar and associated with ethnicity.

• There was a closer match in perceptions of disciplinary practices within participants when ethnicity was a variable. Students and teachers of color agreed more than students as a group and teachers as a group. The same occurred when European American students and teachers were viewed as one group.

• A common factor affecting interpersonal conflicts across individual, ethnic, and gender groups was lack of opportunity to be heard and the communication style used by teachers which caused discomfort for students of color. There also was variance across groups in the intensity, style, depth, and breath in which their story of disciplinary experiences was communicated.

• Along with discrepancies on what happened, students perceived disciplinary events as a series of sequential components while teachers perceived them simply as monolithic incidents.

Discussion

Conflicts of an interpersonal nature were more frequent and significant for African American and Chicano American students, whereas both interpersonal and procedural conflicts affected Filipino Americans and European American students. The results also indicated that student and teacher attitudes, beliefs, and values were associated with ethnicity, gender, and level of academic achievement of the recipients of disciplinary actions.

The results suggested that student-teacher disciplinary interactions were cyclical and continual, rather than linear and passive. The misbehaviors that occurred were questioned, challenged, and reinforced as students and teachers chose to respond in their preferred but disparate modes of conduct that agreed with their beliefs. They acted and met individual needs rather than conform to expected behaviors. Conflict resulted when the powerful position of teachers collided with student resistance. Both students' and teachers' actions defined the course of disciplinary events. Students were not passive recipients of teacher actions. In choosing to resist or comply to rules, they made decisions to ignore, avoid, or acquiesce to teachers' positions, or they actively and deliberately challenged teachers through verbal exchanges.

Four major themes related to disciplinary actions emerged from the data analyses. They were feelings of alienation and disempowerment, perceived injustices in disciplinary

practices, types of coping and problem-solving strategies, and perceived differences in the structure of the disciplinary act.

Feelings of Alienation and Disempowerment

Students saw school as a place centered on teacher needs, while teachers perceived that Lincoln High served high-achieving, well-behaved students and their attendant teachers. Since these students and teachers were not a part of either group seen as preferred, this created feelings of alienation and disempowerment that permeated their perceptions.

Students concluded that their role and status as students gave them no rights. According to them, it was the teacher who started the disciplinary process by referring them. It was the teacher's classroom that was disrupted, and it was the teacher's position that was accepted as truth. They conceded that teachers expected to have power, and the classroom was their place to control. Some students felt that the feelings of powerlessness were exacerbated by academic failure and a history of disciplinary problems. They perceived misbehavior as cyclical: once a bad reputation was established teachers and peers alike expected and even encouraged misconduct.

Although students did not argue for equal status, they maintained that not having an opportunity to be heard was unfair and an abuse of teacher power. They believed they were entitled to express their reality. Students were frustrated when their version of the disciplinary event was dismissed as less important or inaccurate by teachers and administrators. Comments such as: "The conflict starts when the teachers don't listen." (AAF2), "They always think the students are liars." (FAM1), and "They have already made up their minds" (EAM1) illustrate these perceptions. When referred, they felt administrators went through a meaningless ritual of listening but not hearing, since the administrators' primary concern was to keep teachers satisfied. All students by individual, gender, and ethnic groupings accepted that teachers wanted silence in the classroom while they taught lessons, and students did assignments.

Feelings of alienation were repeatedly portrayed with statements that indicated estrangement. For example: "I know they (teachers) just don't care" (FAM2), or "They want bright White kids. We're like the leftovers." (EAFI). Other signs of alienation were the high absentee rate that accounted for 51% of the disciplinary actions taken against these students, and the belief that positive things did not happen in classrooms.

Similarly, teachers saw school as a place focused on the needs of high-achieving honor students. They believed that high-achieving students "were separated" and their teachers were more important.[2] Teachers also maintained that the low-achieving students assigned to them were less academically motivated and more disruptive, whereas high-achieving students were well behaved and the teaching preference of most teachers. These teachers also perceived their peers as inflexible and controlling; that behavioral expectations were difficult for the majority of Lincoln's ethnically diverse students to meet; and high-achieving students and their teachers had no problems, while low-achieving students were seen as disciplinary problems, "written off and not given assistance" (Sheets, 1995b, p. 89). They complained that they were put in positions of being "control freaks" and constantly involved in power struggles with students.

Most teachers were European American and identified as economically middle-class. The majority of students were of color (64%), almost half lived in single-parent homes (49%) and received free or reduced lunch (38%). The feelings of alienation and disempowerment expressed by these teachers were consistent with prior research on student-teacher

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[2] Although there was not a formal tracking system in the school where this study took place, students were assigned to honors classes in math, language arts ,and social studies in ninth grade. These honor classes continued through twelve grade culminating with Advanced Placement classes.

perception conducted by Metz (1990) and Brantlinger (1993). They found that some teachers who differed in class and race from their students were frustrated, discouraged, and demeaned by their association with them. They also felt threatened when student behaviors were inconsistent with their professional values and goals. Likewise, the findings of this study supported the research of Diem (1992), Felice (1981), and Kelly (1994) who also found a relationship among school alienation, low academic achievement, and disciplinary problems.

Perceived Injustices in Disciplinary Practices

Students were united in the belief that there were injustices in the application of rules. They thought some teachers treated some students more harshly than others. These victims were labeled and punished for breaking rules while other students who did the same thing were overlooked by the teacher. If "bad" students caught in this continual pattern of being chastised defended themselves, tried to explain, or demanded fair treatment, the incidents escalated into major confrontations. Students considered this type of capricious rule-changing as a power device used to either remove students with a history of disciplinary problems, who did not engage in the assigned task, or who were disliked. These beliefs are consistent with Doyle's (1986) explanation that students may perceive variations in the enforcement and application of rules as unfair or showing differential treatment. However, he concluded these variations were due to the contextual specificity of rules rather than to teacher discrimination or incompetence.

Students stated that knowledge of the consequence for non-compliance did not determine their action. Factors such as being with and supporting their friends, defending themselves, maintaining a sense of self respect, and fighting for what they felt was fair were stronger influences on their actions than the anticipation of the forthcoming penalty. For example, they knew "cutting" was against the rules. If caught the punishment was Thursday detention. Not attending detention meant Saturday school, and failure to attend Saturday school escalated into a short-term suspension. This knowledge, disseminated though teacher presentations, administrative conferences with students, and student handbooks, did not

influence their decisions. Often they chose to be with their friends rather than attend class, assigned detention, or Saturday school. They added that their deliberate action to meet individual needs (i.e., socialize in class, sleep, listen to music, write notes, cut) which motivated them to disregard teacher directives were due to their own bad attitudes toward school and not necessarily teacher determined. These student perceptions validated Schunk's and Meece's (1992) work that indicated students, as active agents, contribute substantially to classroom order by either cooperating or resisting.

European American students and teachers maintained that there were definite, set rules and guidelines; however, at times, these were inconsistently and unfairly applied, especially by teachers with poor classroom management skills. They also agreed that disciplinary problems were exacerbated by poor teaching skills. These perceptions are in agreement with Garza-Lubeck's (1992) findings that students identified poor classroom management and boring instructional content as factors causing confrontations. Teachers added that some rules might be unclear, implicit, or even unknown to students. This finding agreed with Gottfredson (1989) who reported that students perceived disciplinary problems were a result of unjust and unfairly applied rules, while teachers felt unclear rules caused behavioral problems.

The shared perceptions of European American students and teachers that classroom rules were definitive may have stemmed from their common ethnic identity and cultural backgrounds. European American students argued that teachers had the prerogative to enforce rules as rightful authority figures. Students who were chastised deserved to be corrected because their behavior was disruptive and out of control. Both European American students and teachers concluded that conflict occurred because of personal characteristics and attributes, such as being loud, rude, argumentative, obnoxious, hostile, immature, and unreasonable. .

All teachers believed their role and status as teachers and adults put them in control of and responsible for initiating or avoiding student-teacher confrontations. For example, an European American female teacher stated, "The teacher is supposed to be the adult and

knowledgeable enough how to bring out the best in students" (Sheets, 1995b, p. 85). These teacher perceptions concurred with positions taken by Curwin and Mendler (1988) who maintained that teachers are responsible for discipline, and their actions in the classroom had the greatest effect on student behavior in terms of prevention and escalation.

African American, Filipino American, and Chicano American students believed that there were no set rules and guidelines in classrooms. Samples of their interpretations were: "I don't think there're rules for certain teachers and in certain classes. I also think that there should be." (CAF1), "No, there ain't no rules." (FAM1), and "There's supposed to be rules, but I can't tell." (AAM1). They thought teachers constantly and purposefully created or changed rules at will. Students of color agreed with European American students that in some individual cases students displayed "bad" attitudes, disrespectful behaviors, and chose to socialize in class. However, they maintained that teachers more often abused their power and used rule-creation strategies to punish whenever they felt a need to exercise control, or to remove students who were predicted to fail, or whom they did not like. They believed that cultural, ethnic, and linguistic factors rather than personal characteristics more often were the motivating factors behind disciplinary practices.

Specifically, African American students identified such factors as lack of respect, differences in communication styles, being purposefully pushed to the edge where they were expected and encouraged to be hostile, and feeling that teachers did not care about them, as major causes of disciplinary conflicts. They believed teachers wanted and expected them to "act a fool" in order to justify their disciplinary actions. They also stated that teachers were intimidated by African American males and treated them worse than they did other students. This opinion was shared by Filipino Americans and Chicano Americans. Filipino Americans also sensed not being liked or respected by some European American teachers. They repeatedly referred to their discomfort and mistreatment by teachers who yelled and accused them of lying. "You yell at dogs not at kids," stated Mario (FAM1). They found this mode of correction contrary to their cultural background. This behavior produced shame that motivated them to

"yell back," in response to this perceived personal insult. Chicano American students felt disrespected and disliked, too. They experienced embarrassment and a loss of dignity toward self and family. Respeto, giving respect and being respected, for Chicano American students represented a cultural value that reflected on their family and the quality of their upbringing. Therefore, Chicano American students maintained that the teacher, regardless of the circumstances, should be respected. Not to do so indicated a loss of dignity and brought shame to their family.

Most of the participants held that racist attitudes of teachers affected disciplinary actions, but they disagreed on its intentionality. Most European American teachers and students thought these behaviors were unintentional and unconscious. Students and teachers of color concluded that although racism was "under cover," it was intentional, deliberate, and conscious.

Teachers and students agreed that gender was a discriminatory factor affecting disciplinary practices. They thought males were disciplined more often. This finding was similar to Adams, Astone, Nuñez-Wormack, and Somodlaka. (1994), Streitmatter (1994), and McFadden, Marsh, Price and Hwang (1992) who showed that male students were disciplined more frequently, severely, and publicly than females.

Types of Coping and Problem-Solving Strategies

Varieties of coping and problem-solving mechanisms were used by students and teachers to handle conflict. One common personal preference used by both was avoidance. Students did not attend class, and teachers removed students from the classroom as solution.

Some teachers ignored disruptive and disobedient student behavior and did not normally use the referral process when conflict occurred. However, most indicated that teachers summarily 'kick out' unruly students with or without written referrals. The rationale was their responsibility to educate the remaining students in the class. Although the teachers in this study characterized themselves as caring and supporting, they still expressed strong feelings of frustration and anxiety that appeared to cause them to shift from a preferred student-

centered model to a self-centered model when coping with daily classroom behavioral issues. For example, teachers acknowledged the need to cooperate, compromise, and solve problems within the classroom and did so for most minor disciplinary problems. However, when they reported incidents of student-teacher confrontations, the preference for handling conflict shifted to their personal need to be in control. There was a prevailing feeling that the worth of a teacher was contingent on being able to control a classroom of students. As one European American male teacher stated, "If a teacher has disciplinary problems, that teacher is a personal failure."

Teachers also suggested different solutions to disciplinary problems. European American teachers felt that the solution to disciplinary problems was to maintain control. They assumed a position of authority and responsibility for keeping order and managing confrontations. The two teachers of color believed mutual respect rather than control was a more powerful tool for minimizing conflicts with students. Since teachers thought interpersonal conflict was due to personality issues, they advocated the need to teach and learn negotiation skills. They emphasized negotiation skills, such as how to control temper, avoid personality clashes, and how not to personalize disciplinary issues. These suggested personal skills were devoid of the cultural and ethnic dimensions, such as communication styles, relational patterns, social taboos, and cultural rules of decorum, deference and etiquette, scholars (Gay, 1981; Kochman, 1981; Taylor, 1990) identify as critical in conflict situations. Nonetheless, these teachers' attitudes confirmed Fisher's (1994) and Duetch's (1994) contentions that most conflict management models only emphasize individual characteristics and personal preferences for handling conflict.

Improving student-teacher communication skills was endorsed by the four student ethnic groups as a solution to disciplinary conflicts. African American students tended to withdraw when confronted with the stress associated with the continual struggle of adapting to a racist classroom environment. They deliberately chose to ignore what they perceived to be daily, unfair racist treatment by non-engagement and absenteeism. As Jayson (AAM1)

explained, "I don't pay no attention, cause if I did, it would throw me off." Dana (AAF2) responded similarly, "It's not worth the battle. They (students) let things slide cause they feel like teachers expect them to blow up and take it to the extreme." They felt this was essential for their survival because the emotional and psychological costs of constant action were too high. When these students made decisions not to resist passively, they verbally challenged teachers. In their futile efforts to explain their position, they were judged as argumentative and hostile, which led to overt confrontations and disciplinary action. This difference in communication styles described by African American students corresponded with scholarship and research on African American communication styles. Kochman (1981) explained that African Americans distinguish between argument used to explain a difference of opinion and argument used to express hostility and anger. He contrasted this with European Americans who normally speak in a dispassionate low-key style and use argument only when angry. He argued that these differences in communication styles often lead European Americans to view African Americans as negative, confrontational, and intransigent when, in fact, they are presenting their position, conveying meaning, and attempting persuasion. African Americans also included not registering for classes taught by teachers they dislike as a coping strategy. They avoided honors classes because they disliked the teachers. They dropped classes in which they knew they could not "hang" emotionally. However, they found these maneuvers disconcerting and irrational. They valued education and had hopes of continuing their schooling beyond high school. Often they chose to strengthen interpersonal bonds through group support. For example when a student was confronted and shocked when her favorite teacher used a derogatory term to refer to her ethnic group in her presence, she turned to another African American student in the class and a friend outside class rather than confront the teacher. She made a deliberate choice not to take direct action.

European American students used more emotionally-oriented approaches to cope with conflict. They reported personal dispositional attitudes such as, being mad, in a bad mood, bored, or not feeling like coping for fifty-five minutes with teachers they did not like as

reasons to avoid the situation. When remaining in an uncomfortable situation, they maintained an independent, isolated attitude toward social interactions in the classroom. Students summarized this sentiment with, "I tune out " (EAM1), "They just sit there and wait for the class to be over" (EAF1), and "What interests them (students) is jut being left alone." (EAF2). They felt they could achieve academic success that would ultimately lead to "the good life" by conforming and "not fighting the system". They advocated minding their own business, obeying teacher directives, and accomplishing the academic goals needed for success as ways to avoid disciplinary problems. Unlike African American students, they did not advocate supporting others even if they perceived unjust treatment.

The coping strategy of Filipino American students' was to either ignore teacher behavior or avoid it by non-attendance. They acknowledged the power structure of school and their own powerless position. They felt teachers were in power, and they were not the preferred students. They used avoidance, hard work, and silence as means for survival. The additional benefit of this style was the concealment of their accent and their perceived linguistic deficiencies. They also used the stereotype that Asians were good in class to their benefit, but informed the researcher that they knew this was attributed to the Chinese not the Filipino students. Of the four groups, these students experienced more difficulties with peers than with teachers. This group had the greatest number of student-student assault incidents.

Although Chicano American students had attendance problems, they attended more regularly than the other three student groups. They attended classes on time and as scheduled. Once there, time was used for personal purposes. They ignored academic tasks and perceived linguistic and racist mistreatment by teachers, and used class time to their personal advantage, such as sleeping, applying make-up, socializing, throwing spit-wads, loud yawns, and not bringing required materials to class. These students maintained that they rarely confronted the teacher directly, but their behavior consistently sabotaged teacher goals. Their general mode of non-engagement was reflected in low academic achievement. This group had the lowest GPA. Unlike the other groups of color, their motivation appeared to

be social rather than academic. In this respect they were similar to the European American students who also "tuned out" while in class. Chicano Americans like African Americans voiced the responsibility to come to the defense of their friends, especially if they perceived mistreatment. The opinions of the family were expressed as a reason for not misbehaving.

Perceived Differences in the Structure of the Disciplinary Act

The student and teacher groups perceived the structure of the disciplinary event differently. Along with discrepancies on what happened, students perceived the disciplinary situation as a series of parts while teachers saw it simply as a whole incident. Students' perceptions were on two distinct levels: the content and the components through which misbehaviors were viewed. For example, to erroneously accuse a student of talking who turned around to listen is a variation in content. The other level of perception was whether the disciplinary act was considered as a single entity or as a series of component parts. Students placed equal importance on all the specific parts of the disciplinary act. They included issues such as who started it, explanations of their intentions, and reasons why they challenged the teacher's position as consequential. They concentrated on the specificity of the act, or in their words the "pieces" of what happened, as opposed to teachers who considered the act as "a whole case" that verified student misconduct. To illustrate: A student was disrespectful to a teacher. She admitted calling the teacher a "bitch," but she felt the teacher's version of "the truth" was exaggerated and did not accurately explain all the details of what actually took place. Since the teacher quoted her verbatim on the referral, she felt should it have been accurate. She maintained that the teacher over-dramatized to build her case assuming she would be believed. The student did not deny she had been disrespectful, but felt all the details prior to, during, and after the confrontation, and what she actually said were important pieces. The teacher, on the other hand, was more concerned with the disrespectful act as a whole.

Another student was disciplined for being tardy and touching the head of a new student who sat in his assigned desk. According to him these two elements were not disputable. What

was disconcerting was his inability to explain that he knew the new student and the touching was an act of friendship not aggression.

In both of these cases, the students perceived that teachers disregarded the myriad of specific components as irrelevant or unimportant. While students believed teachers exaggerated to strengthen their case, they did not think this behavior was necessarily intentional. Rather, it was "the teacher's way of seeing things," and frequently the only way was theirs. Teacher statements did not differentiate these two levels. Perhaps this lack was attributed to their tendency to penalize students procedurally, which does not allow for extenuating circumstances, motivations and explanations to be considered.

Students did not argue the truthfulness of their misbehavior, but they did question the inconsistencies and missing elements in the teachers understanding of all the causes that could have exonerated them. They felt that if teachers understood all the "pieces," the severity of the disciplinary action would decrease, lessen the type and amount of punishment, and minimize student-teacher confrontations that resulted from these misperceptions.

Interpretations

The most powerful message that emerged from this investigation was the simplicity and honesty with which students described educators as uninformed, uncaring, and insensitive when handling student-teacher conflicts in classrooms. The responses of students and teachers revealed that explanations, causes, and feelings inherent in the overt actions of students were experienced without teachers' awareness and acknowledgment of ethnic and cultural differences. Students' and teachers' perceptions of the underlying justifications, motivations, and reasons for student-teacher misbehavior were different. According to students' reports, the primary motivation for cooperation and compliance to teacher behavioral expectations was affective, the need to be liked. Teachers appeared to have no clue as to what precipitated confrontations from a student perspective. "They just go off," was given as an expected student pattern of behavior. The common strategy used by teachers to solve problems was to remove students from the classroom.

Disciplinary problems were resolved and punished by a third party, administrators. This procedure predicted that student-teacher confrontations were doomed to be repeated. Students and teachers did not jointly attempt to understand each other's side of the conflict, or their shared responsibility for developing healthy interpersonal relationships. The same types of interpersonal conflict occurred over and over. Teachers corrected or confronted students appropriately or inappropriately. Students retaliated with disruptive, abusive language directed at teachers. Students were neither heard nor encouraged to discuss issues motivating their behavior, much less generate their own behavioral alternatives and options. This mode of disciplinary intervention by school staff placed students in a defensive posture, and limited their opportunity for change.

The consequences of a Euroc[illegible] that did not understand or incorporate aspects of the African Caricano [illegible] cultural and disciplinary [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

providing a safe, supportive context for the expression of feelings. The result was that neither student nor teacher experienced different and satisfactory solutions to the problems in their relationships. Nor had they learned skills and resources necessary to produce change. Instead, feeling threatened, powerless, and vulnerable caused both teachers and students to be critical and angry in classroom confrontations which tended to intensify their magnitude and consequences.

Teachers seemed to feel that the demands of their teaching responsibilities did not allow them to spend classroom time resolving immediate conflicts with students. Nor was there any time for them to systematically study and reflect on their own actions and responses to disciplinary issues. There were some slight indications that they felt knowing more about ethnicity and cultural diversity (as when they indicated a need to learn how to communicate better with diverse ethnic groups) might have a positive effect on classroom discipline. Such knowledge cannot be acquired without sufficient time and assistance to study, reflect, and practice more culturally sensitive relational skills. Similarly, students need to better understand their own cultural orientations and ethnic identities, and how these affect their attitudes, values and behaviors. They also need to learn a greater variety of coping, and survival strategies, and how to determine which ones are best to apply in particular situations to minimize conflicts with teachers. Opportunities to explore these possibilities did not appear to be present.

Teachers in this study felt pressured to maintain controlled, quiet classrooms. To do so required the unquestioned and unshared exercise of power and authority. Teachers viewed students as objects to be acted upon, as passive recipients of behavioral expectations and disciplinary mandates. Their attitudes reflected sentiments such as "I'm here to teach, not to win a popularity contest," or "You leave your problems at the door." The students in this study felt that a major step forward in accomplishing this would be teachers respecting their humanity, honoring their points of view, showing more caring and emotional support, and establishing more personal relationships with them. Herein lies one of the major sources of continuing tensions between students and teachers in pluralistic classrooms. Teachers place

their hopes for improving the functioning of the classroom on increasing technique skills. These dealt with classroom management. Students concentrated on open communication and better interpersonal relationships.

Final Words

This investigation confirmed that students are not as powerless as some might think. Often behaviors that at first appear to be merely impulsive reactions to others' decisions, are actually deliberately and thoughtfully chosen courses of action. For the most part, the students in this study acted deliberately on their beliefs rather than reacting to the behaviors of others. Additionally, although all students, including European Americans, felt disliked, discriminated, and unjustly treated when chastised, only students of color felt themselves, their families, their culture, their ethnicity, and their mode of discourse disrespected, minimized, contradicted, misunderstood and devalued. These feelings placed ethnic minority students in untenable situations with no choice but to maintain ethnic integrity by defending, protecting, and responding to perceived or real injustices. School like other aspects of their lives appeared to be a struggle made tolerable by avoidance, resistance, solidarity, and social relationships.

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